Medical care and services are scandalously high in the US. They are free in the Soviet Union.

Higher education is free in the Soviet Union and there is always a job awaiting graduates in the field of their choice. The cost of a college education in the US is beyond the reach of all but well paid skilled workers' families. Millions of working class youth in the US who are talented and intelligent either cannot go or cannot complete their college and university training because they cannot afford it. And a large proportion who do get an education here cannot find employment in the field for which they have been trained.

In the Soviet Union there is minimal seasonal and frictional unemployment of workers betwen jobs, but no structural unemployment. Technologically displaced workers are retrained with full pay and placed in jobs elsewhere in their expanding economy. There is in fact an acute shortage of labor, the bitter heritage of the 20 million killed in World War II and the families they didn't generate.

Soviet workers therefore are not harried to meet the costs of present day living nor are they mortgaging their future. They are increasingly certain of their prospects. They can retire with adequate pensions at age 60 for men and 55 for women. There are rest homes, spas, vacation resorts and recreational facilities to be enjoyed at low cost.

The Soviet workers, apparently, are not alienated by their work experience and environment. They appear to be in harmony with their lot and times. Their lives and pursuits suggest a set of priorities that are not only changing the world but in the process are reshaping themselves as well.

They want to continue the work of reconstruction and development of their lives, economy and society. For 22 of the 55 years of their existence they have known war on their soil. The losses in lives, treasure and time have been staggering. They, therefore, want peace. They have toiled hard and long for peace and for peaceful relations and trade with all countries. They feel that in great measure the relaxation of tensions between themselves and other nations is a recognition of their power and their determination to use this power to promote and maintain world peace.

They are proud of their achievements in science, technology, culture and rising prosperity. They invite the world to come to their country, to see first-hand the progress they have made. They ask only that the truth be told about them. I regard myself as having been fortunate to have been able to accept their invitation, to have seen them and their works. It is an experience no US citizen can afford to miss.

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A HIGHER QUALITY OF LIFE

by
ERNEST DE MAIO

President, District 11, United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America

VEF Electrical Appliances Plant — Riga, Latvia, USSR

"When a grievance arises in a Soviet plant, the union has the final say on its disposition."

5¢

ERNEST DE MAIO

A Higher Quality of Life

A UE delegation of ten representing the national union and districts arrived in Moscow November 6, 1972. We looked forward to what we knew would be a memorable experience. We had two objectives: to establish relations with the electrical and power workers union of the Soviet Union and to sound out the prospects for trade that would provide employment to workers in our industry.

Our hosts were friendly and gave generously of their time and hospitality. The program, which had been worked out by us prior to our arrival, put our endurance to a severe test.

As we toured the Soviet factories, training centers, union-operated children's day care schools, and were introduced to the rich cultural life of the workers, I was impressed by the immense difference in the quality of life enjoyed by Soviet workers compared to that of their US brothers and sisters. Though the gap is closing, materially US workers are better off. They have more and larger automobiles but an inferior and inadequate public transportation system. Housing except for the poor is better in the US. But there are no slums or ghettos in the Soviet Union and no poor.

In the US, there are families of great wealth who own and control the economic and political life of the nation. Whereas in the Soviet Union no such class exists. None of the great leaders of the Soviet Union past or present have built or bequeathed dynasties of power or wealth.

Education is a great democratic force in the USSR. The workers there are better educated and trained. From two thirds to three fourths of all workers in the factories we visited were active participants in some training or educational program. There is nothing even remotely close to this in the US.

All of our delegates remarked on the leisurely pace of production in Soviet plants. We were fearful that the Soviet workers would resent our references to speed-up in US plants and its absence in theirs. We were told by their trade union leaders that this was often debated but never changed. How, they queried, can we justify speed-

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up in a socialist system? There are emulation contests where teams, departments and plants challenge each other in friendly competition on the quality and quantity of production and there are various incentives, but essentially the workers set their own pace. Nevertheless, because of innovative changes and new technology, productivity is rising.

We were surprised to see in every factory visited living plants tended by the workers. There were barber shops and beauty shops in the factories. Workers arranged appointments for grooming during working hours, with time off with pay. The only beard we saw was sported by one of our delegates.

Every factory had a medical clinic staffed by a doctor and nurses. Health care on the job was preventive, diagnostic and attentive to minor injuries and ailments. More serious cases were referred to hospitals, sanatoria or specialists. Safety is controlled by the union, with the power to shut down jobs, operations or plants until the conditions are made as safe as the state of the art can make them. Safety inspectors are paid by the state but are appointed by and responsible to the union.

On the union shop committee of every factory is a full time cultural functionary whose task is to promote and supervise drama, music groups, photography and literary clubs, etc. These groups put on plays, operas, operettas and musical comedies—popular, classic and often creative. Cultural directors are also responsible for the distribution of tickets for professional dramas, operas, ballets, etc.

Sports, both participatory and spectator, are a mass activity among Soviet workers. There are intra-plant contests with the best teams challenging the top teams of other plants both intra- and intercity. Chess, which is considered a sport, is highly popular among individuals. In the physical contact sports, soccer, basketball and hockey have huge mass participation and support.

Prior to my election as a delegate, a district leader asked me, "Are there unions in the Soviet Union, and if so, why don't they strike?" I replied affirmatively on the first part of the question, but on the second part, I replied I wasn't sure, and if elected I would inquire. This question was put to our trade union hosts in the USSR. Their reply is worth passing on.

There is a big difference, we were told, between the conditions that prevail in your country and ours. Here, the spokesman said, the unions are powerful instruments controlled by the workers to protect and promote their interests. When a grievance arises in a Soviet plant, the union has the final say on its disposition. Plant managers

in the Soviet Union are appointed for two years. If the union is displeased with a manager and passes a motion of no confidence in him his contract cannot be renewed. He must go. Plant managers, therefore, have an interest in living up to the terms and conditions of the union contract and labor code.

Because the Soviet society is expanding, with a high growth rate in industry, there is a continuing need for more engineers, technicians and skilled workers. This expansion provides upward mobility into better jobs with higher pay. This in part explains why training and schooling paid for by the unions is a mass phenomenon in Soviet industry.

While the living standards of the average Soviet worker are below that of the average American worker, they are living better today than ever and their standard of living is constantly rising. Soviet workers know that the good things of life do not come from wishing for them, but must be produced by them. Since they are, in effect, producing for themselves they have a real and direct interest in the quantity and quality of the goods they make. Though this aspect of their lives is self-centered, they are a warm-hearted generous people. They have contributed, at the expense of a more rapid rise in their own standards, to the welfare of many countries not as well off.

The largest steel mill in India, the great Aswan dam in Egypt, the foundations of modern industry in Eastern Europe, China, and developing nations, are major contributions to the welfare of the peoples of these countries. This has been done without economic penetration of these countries by the Soviet Union.

Despite this and in addition to the higher quality of life of the Soviet workers, they are in tangible, meaningful ways better off than their US counterparts. There is little or no consumer debt in the USSR—while in the USA consumer debt has passed the $157 billion mark with most of it owed by the workers. Soviet workers also have huge savings. This can't be entirely due to shortage of goods because stores have increasing stocks of goods on hand. It more correctly reflects the fact that wages are rising, taxes are going down, and there is no inflation in the Soviet Union. Prices are the same throughout the Soviet Union and they have not been raised in over a quarter of a century. In fact, there have been many price cuts, as goods become more plentiful.

Housing is very expensive in the US and runs between 20 to 25 per cent of income. There is also a huge mortgage debt of about $350 billion. Whereas rent is very low in the USSR, held down by law to 5 per cent of monthly earnings and there is no mortgage debt.